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SOLDIERS OF V CORPS TASK FORCE IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE, SPREAD GOODWILL IN BALAD

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BALAD, Iraq -- In the week leading up to Thanksgiving, the Soldiers of V Corps' Task Force 1st Battalion, 77th Armor gave the citizens of Balad plenty to be thankful for, by donating medical supplies to the Balad General Hospital and toys to children at the Balad Preschool.

Several medical units from Forward Operating Bases Anaconda and Paliwoda donated the medical supplies, which were unloaded at the Balad General Hospital with help from the 203rd Iraqi National Guard Battalion November 22.

"These are some much needed supplies for this hospital. A lot of people will benefit from them," said Capt. Henry Delacruz, commander of B Company, Task Force 1-77.

"There are enough doctors here; they just don't have the medications they need."

In addition to the supplies, Soldiers from the 1st Infantry Division task force also broke ground for a emergency room for the hospital, which should be completed within the next three months.

The approximately 300 children at the Balad Preschool -- the city's only preschool -- were next to benefit from the task force's generosity, in the form of several boxes of toys.

In addition to spreading goodwill, the toy drop also allowed the children to see a side of the Soldiers they don't normally see.

"It's important to do toy drops with the unit that patrols the area. The children see them on patrols every day, and this is a chance for the children to see the Soldiers up close in a more relaxed environment," said Capt. Lillian Mongan, the task force's civil affairs team leader.

Mongan said handing out toys is also good for the American Soldiers, letting them see the Iraqi people from a different perspective as well.

Family members of task force members, both in Germany and the United States, as well as Soldiers from the division's 4th Battalion, 3rd Air Defense Artillery, donated the toys.

"Every time we go to FOB Danger, we pick up a bunch of toys from 1st Lt. William Diefenbach," Mongan said. "He started a toy donation program, and the 4/3rd ADA Soldiers have conexes full of toys."

Missions like these are not unusual for the Task Force 1-77 Soldiers.

"We've been able to do the school supply drops every month for about six months now," said Capt. Jason Goodfriend, the task force civil-military operations officer.

"There's over 200 schools in the area, and they can all use supplies. Many Balad children now have backpacks and school supplies because of these missions."

The task force has also taken on several rebuilding projects in their area of operations as well. Since they began their tour of duty in Balad, Goodfriend said, the task force has completed roughly \$2.6 million worth of projects, most notably the recently completed Balad Municipal Building.

"We've completed 40 projects at this point, and have another 26 ongoing, all while still conducting combat operations," Goodfriend said. "When our 12 months here is done, I expect us to have about 80 done."

Goodfriend stressed that the task force doesn't decide arbitrarily what projects to take on in the Balad area. They must first be approved by the city council.

"Not one project begins in this city without the approval of the district committee," Goodfriend said. "That means every one of the projects we do here is very important to the people of the city, because they pick them. We maximize our funds for civil infrastructure and spend our money where it affects the people directly."

